

West Seattle Triangle November 17, 2008 Community Working Session Notes

Overview

The City of Seattle sponsored a working session for the West Seattle Triangle area in response to shared interest from the community, developers, business owners and property owners. With ongoing and anticipated development combined with planned public investment, the area is poised for change. It offers a unique opportunity to create a shared vision that we can work collectively to implement as development moves forward. This goal of this initial working session was to summarize the key issues that have come out of recent community meetings and shape a city-sponsored public workshop planned for the coming year.

The November 17th session was held from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Merrill Gardens West Seattle. Over twenty invited community and business representatives participated. The session began with a presentation that provided context, tied considerations to the Comprehensive Plan and the West Seattle Junction Neighborhood Plan, offered analysis of site conditions and identified opportunities and challenges that had been identified by the community.

Following the presentation, breakout groups addressed three questions:

- 1) What are the key benefits for the neighborhood?
- 2) What are the challenges to realizing the broader vision?
- 3) What are the most important elements for success as we move forward?

Breakout groups reported back to the full audience. Discussion of next steps identified January as the timeframe for the next session, currently planned as a public workshop/charrette. Attendees were asked to forward names of other community members to be informed of the January session.

Working Session Purpose

Develop a shared vision for the Triangle Area and agree on the key actions necessary to implement that vision, both public and private:

- Take advantage of the unique opportunities offered at this time and place
- Align current community planning interests
- Integrate planning for public investments (RapidRide, street and park improvements) with private development projects
- Discuss a framework to guide near and long term implementation

Planning Overview

Staff from Seattle's Department of Planning and Development (Lyle Bicknell) began the session with an overview of the discussions and considerations to date. He noted that this was a kick-off for a collective big-picture look at the future of the West Seattle Triangle and its role as a gateway to the community. Change is already coming to the area but there is a window of time in which to shape the direction of development and improvements to create something greater than the "sum of the parts". It is an opportunity to build on the best elements of the neighborhood - the quirky, small-town feel; walkable access to shops, small businesses and parks; family oriented character and sustainable attributes of green infrastructure, transit and workforce housing.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and the West Seattle Junction Neighborhood Plan was outlined as well as the connections to roads and highways, public transit, shopping districts, neighborhood amenities and parks and open space. The Triangle attributes that will contribute to a future neighborhood include the wide streets, a commercial core, the YMCA, the parks and trails including Camp Long, an established community, and good transportation connections.

Denny Onslow from Harbor Properties talked about the challenges and opportunities at hand, also noting what they have heard to date from discussions with West Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Fairmont Community Association and interested community members. Participants further contributed to that list by adding “sense of place” and “pride of place” to the attributes. Some questions for the challenges were whether West Seattle is a destination, why Rapid Ride isn’t using the main thoroughfare of Fauntleroy as its route, and caution about the disruption to existing businesses while transitioning the area to new uses.

(see attached powerpoint presentation)

Summary of Small Group Reports

Reports from each of the small groups were organized into key benefits, challenges and important elements for success as we move forward. Common themes emerged as follow:

Benefits:

Location, location

The area’s location makes it the gateway to West Seattle and the views of the city and mountains when heading towards the bridge are spectacular. It was noted that the drama is in departing and that the arrival view is disappointing.

Topography, street-grid and public facilities

The character, topography and location of the triangle make it ideal for a new neighborhood. The area is well defined; has wide, flat public rights-of-way offering ample space to create inviting pedestrian environments; easy transit access to downtown; the YMCA is at its core; it is walkable to the Junction and adjacent to the golf course and Camp Long.

Blank slate

An area in transition with many underdeveloped sites, opportunity to modify zoning and land use to fit the desired future, including jobs and housing.

Challenges:

Property ownerships

Although many community members, including property owners, are interested in the area’s potential to develop, there are concerns regarding a change from the current auto-oriented businesses. There are many properties under different ownership so realizing a vision with multiple parties could be difficult.

Conflicting goals

It will be a challenge to balance the community’s desire for pedestrian and bike-friendly streets and sustainable infrastructure with the anticipated parking demand and the traffic impacts it will have.

Traffic

The area is surrounded by hard to cross streets - Fauntleroy Way SW, SW Alaska Street and 35th Avenue SW - major arterials with fast moving traffic. It isolates the area for those within it and those wanting to reach it from surrounding areas.

Current land use

Vacancies, lack of interim uses especially for highly visible properties, current auto-oriented businesses, and the lack of good development at the entry corners fail to create a “gateway” to West Seattle and make the area feel “scaleless” and “edgeless” in its current condition.

Parking

Parking availability is a recurring concern. Participants perceived a problem with “park & hide” where commuters park in the Triangle area all day and get on the bus near the West Seattle Bridge - a problem they attributed partly to a lack of sufficient transit service in West Seattle. Participants

anticipated this would increase with the addition of a RapidRide stop. Others were concerned that the addition of new development without sufficient parking would further exacerbate what they view as an existing parking challenge. Some felt the inclusion of a shared parking garage was needed - and others felt a park & ride garage was necessary.

Important Elements:

Cohesive Urban Design

Plan the area to make best use of its existing assets to create a walkable, livable place with flexible right-of-way development, lots of trees and landscape and a tree lined, humanized Fauntleroy Boulevard that creates a positive experience for the pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

Gateway & view corridors

Make this the gateway to West Seattle. Grab the corners so that both public and private development contribute to the sense of gateway. Preserve and use the view corridors.

Sense of place

Take pride in West Seattle's strong sense of community and place. It is an asset to build upon in the redevelopment of the triangle. The triangle can offer a series of experiences, a clearly defined pedestrian relationship to the Junction and an integration of retail with the surrounding neighborhood. An important question will be whether the future businesses serve its residents or the broader West Seattle community.

Open Space

Use the wide public rights-of-way to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, look for opportunities to include open spaces scaled to community use and to create stronger connections to the public open spaces across 35th by improved pedestrian crossings and good trailhead connections.

Community Facilities

Build on the YMCA as a community-wide facility. Improve its visibility and access. Consider other uses such as daycares and community schools.

Family Housing

Consider the need for both family and affordable housing in the mix of plans for the area rather than focusing primarily on singles and couples.

Break-out group notes

Michael's Group Notes

Benefits:

- Location, proximity to downtown - great for commuters
- Proximity to existing retail cores
- 80 foot rights-of-way
- Distinct geography with well-defined edges
- Proximity to golf course and Camp Long
- View corridors, especially California and Alaska - should be preserved
- Gateway as West Seattle identifier
- Approach from West Seattle Bridge with landscape maintenance (now overgrown with blackberries)
- Pedestrian connections east/west are flat
- New neighborhood opportunity - blank slate
- Fauntleroy - major arterial - great access and visibility
- Walkable junction on the edge of the heart of West Seattle
- Fire Station nearby
- YMCA

Challenges:

- Current uses and ownership
- Park and hiders - commuters
- Auto oriented business = YMCA
- Finding non auto-oriented businesses - boutiques
- Idea: create round the clock parking structure for all of the Triangle
- Connections across Fauntleroy - especially walkers and bikers
- Affordable and workforce housing so employees don't have to drive and park
- Finding space for open space
- Existing infrastructure in disrepair
- Subsurface drainage - lots of water coming own from Mount
- Future of the viaduct?
- No changers - resistance to development
- Fractured property ownership - realizing vision among multiple owners
- Identify a name for the area
- Multiple conflicting goals: parking vs. pedestrians vs. sustainability
- Vast area of single family feeding isolated commercial area
- Vacancy of interim uses - transition/temporary uses to NOT attract bad element

Important Elements:

- Gateway
- Cohesive urban design
- Planting a lot of trees along streets
- Flexible ROW development
- View corridor preservation
- Humanizing Fauntleroy, along the street and crossing the street
- Integration of retail with surrounding residential neighborhood

Benefits:

- Retail for the broader community
- Zoning/land use
- Bring jobs
- Elements are here
- Alaskan+Fauntleroy as 'sense of place'
- A series of experiences

Challenges:

- Poor entrance
- West Seattle as a destination
- HUB park & hide
- Parking (170 on street/108 ?)
- Ferry traffic
- Making streets and sidewalks better
- Making sure players keep their commitments
- Meshing differing interests between residential and commercial
- Transitional period that accommodates existing businesses
- Fear
- Not an OED priority
- Making all retail work in the broader area

Important Elements:

- Community pride
- Identity - immediate/broad
- Provides a series of experiences
- Connection to Junction
- Fauntleroy+Alaska as a 'sense of place'
- Street grid
- Views
- Gateway-First Arrival
- Proximity to green
- Proximity to downtown
- Affordable housing
- YMCA

Key Benefits:

- Integration opportunity with Camp Long and the Golf Course perimeter trail/needs improved access and visibility but could become an entrance to Camp Long
- Alaska is flat and could be a good pedestrian connection to California
- Clearly defined perimeters
- Proximity to transportation corridors and downtown
- Stadium - exploring other uses - an opportunity

Challenges:

- Scaleless/edgeless character of Fauntleroy
- Difficult crossings
- Fauntleroy - speed of traffic, access to new retail and difficulty in crossing
- Fauntleroy - create a boulevard with channelized turn lanes
- Lack of YMCA visibility - new view/access & alignment to the Y
- Rapid Ride - will need a parking solution (RPZ or parking structure)
- Oregon/38th/Fauntleroy - difficult but may be a possibility
- Retail - increase will need more parking for both staff and customers - provide it in the buildings

Important Elements:

- Clearly defined pedestrian experience linked to the Junction
- True boulevard along Fauntleroy (how you can close, how defined by the pedestrian experience; water catchments/places to site)
- Fauntleroy "Boulevard" with landscape, pedestrian improvements and turn lanes that creates a gateway to West Seattle
- Develop property to enhance the "gateway" - grab the corners
- Ease and safety of crossings at Alaska, Fauntleroy and 35th
- 38th & Oregon parks could enhance throughout
- Junction point has lots of traffic, so mediating transportation needs with those of pedestrians
- Parking - also tied to transit needs
- School - community school and daycare
- Open spaces - scaled for local use
- Multifamily housing for families - 3 bedrooms